

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LAW
MANAGEMENT & HUMANITIES

[ISSN 2581-5369]

Volume 4 | Issue 4

2021

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Use of Private Transport by College Students: A Threat to Personal Safety and Community Feeling

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ABSTRACT

Access to transportation is an important factor in deciding access to key life-enhancing facilities. Almost every aspect of life is affected by it. Where public transport is open to all and generally considered of low quality in urban India, private vehicle is one of the many attractions of modern life that is well sought after. However, not everyone has access to private transportation. Often, this inaccessibility of transportation facilities overlaps with low income and decreased quality of living which heightens social alienation. There are a number of factors which link access to transport and lack of community feeling. The present paper uses secondary data and previous research findings to substantiate the hypothesis that use of private transportation is detrimental to college students, in terms of personal safety and decreasing community feeling and increasing sense of alienation. It attempts to contextualize alienation with respect to differential access to transport via relative deprivation, powerlessness and isolation, specifically in urban areas in India. It also gives an overview of how use of private transportation is harmful for college students in terms of their safety and security and how encouragement of public transportation can help combat the situation.

Keywords: *Transport disadvantage, Social exclusion, Alienation, Community feeling, Personal safety, Relative deprivation.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Transportation is an essential contributing factor in rapid urbanisation and economic growth. An efficient and reliable transportation system connects remote areas to economic hubs and improves access to workplaces and labour markets, which can further improve incomes of economically backward classes. Hence, transportation as an asset becomes important in social mobility.

For the purpose of this paper, public transportation refers to forms of transportation that is open

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to public, charge fixed fares and run on fixed routes, such as buses and trains. On the other hand, private and personal transportation refer to forms of transport privately owned and used for personal or individual use.

Access to transportation, especially private, is a primary manifestation of economic capital that is available to an individual. This economic capital seamlessly translates into class, that is, transport assumes a central role in widening the gap between already distanced social groups via differential access to it. As private ownership of vehicle is increasing steadily, its effects on the socio-economic front is important to take into account. The clear links between private ownership of vehicle, transport disadvantage, social exclusion and alienation can be established,

The unaffordability of private transport or the lack of public transit options forces this segment of the urban population to walk or cycle increasingly long distances, and, consequently, suffer severe pollution. As Indian cities continue to spread outward, those residents too poor to afford motorised transport will be increasingly put at a disadvantage, and further cut off from employment, recreational, educational, medical and other activity sites they need to access in the city (Baindur, Deepak, 2015, p-6).

Narrowing the scope of the study, use of personal transport can have detrimental effect on college students, specifically being a threat to safety and community feeling. It is imperative to mention here that there have been previous research findings which have established a strong connection between transport disadvantage and social exclusion. What this article focuses on, is particularly concerning alienation faced by college students due to differential access to transportation, while also addressing how personal transport can jeopardize safety and security.

(A) Hypothesis

The use of private transportation has a detrimental effect on college students in terms of personal safety and community feeling, because of which public transportation may be encouraged to combat the issue.

(B) Research Methodology

The research methodology used in the present paper is “qualitative methodology by use of secondary analysis” in order to present an analysis of already available data regarding the topic at hand.

This is an in-depth study on a particular research problem. Qualitative research was conducted using secondary data from books, journals, online sources, articles etc. The limitation of this

method is that the researcher cannot be sure if the data that is used was collected by using the correct methods and biases were avoided.

(C) Aims of the Study

Firstly, the objective of the study is to establish by way of previous research findings, the link between transportation disadvantage and social exclusion.

Secondly, taking help of collected secondary empirical evidence and findings, the study establishes the role of transport in social alienation in college students by way of theoretical perspectives.

Thirdly, the study also gives an overview of how use of private transport can be a threat to safety and security of college students.

Fourthly, the aim is to provide with an overview of how encouraging public transport can help combat the situation.

II. UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND ALIENATION

Both social exclusion and alienation, as theoretical concepts have been extensively written about. Both are important indicators for understanding social phenomena and corresponding policy initiatives. There are many definitions of the concepts and hence, it is important to narrow them down to the core aspects of the concepts needed in this study. For this purpose,

Social exclusion is a complex and multi-dimensional process. It involves the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in a society, whether in economic, social, cultural or political arenas. It affects both the quality of life of individuals and the equity and cohesion of society as a whole (Levitas, Ruth et al., 2007, p-9)

The concept of alienation is more important to understand for the current study. The *Marxist theory of alienation* is innately unique to a capitalistic system. It is often understood as a considerable estrangement from product of labour, the process of labour, others and the self. However, as a core theme of sociological studies, it is important to clearly mention which aspect or understanding of alienation is crucial here. For this purpose, Melvin Seeman (1959) had put forward five alternative meaning of alienation, namely *powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation and self-estrangement*. The concept would be dealt in detail later on, in the article.

III. WHAT IS TRANSPORTATION DISADVANTAGE?

As the term may suggest, transport disadvantage is a construct that deals with the relationship between access to transportation facilities, individual circumstances and following disadvantage. It is not at all a new theme in understanding social exclusion as substantial research has already been done. In a similar study by Currie and Delbosc (2011) they found that,

although the majority of literature focuses on transport disadvantage imposed by not owning a car, research into 'forced' car ownership suggests that the high costs of owning and running a car can impose transport disadvantage through financial stress (Abstract).

Another research into transport and public policy by Banister and Hall (1981) cited by Karen Lucas (2012) found that,

transport clearly had an important role to play in determining social outcomes for different sectors of modern society in terms of both the absence of adequate transport services and the impact of the transport system on individuals and communities (para 9)

What this essentially implies that transport can be a major cause of a feeling of alienation or social exclusion. Niti Aayog chief, Amitabh Kant said that 22 people out of a 1000 own car in India whereas this figure is 980 in US and 850 in UK (Abbas, Muntazir, 2018) A global comparison is not extremely important in this study but the discrepancy between the social resources in the countries is too clear to ignore. The above cited article also states that car ownership in India will grow by 775% with 175 cars per 1000 people in 2040, as found out by The International Energy Agency. This implies that a very small population, 2.2% only have access to private vehicles. It can also be assumed quite easily that access to personal vehicle for college students is way less than this number.

IV. PRIVATE TRANSPORT: A THREAT TO SAFETY?

This hypothesis might seem a little far-fetched in its narrow scope, since the study only focuses on personal transport as a threat to safety and security of college students. A study conducted by Maharaj Singh (2018) cites

a global status report on road safety 2015, reflecting information from 180 countries, Globally, road traffic crashes are a leading cause of death among young people, and the main cause of death among those aged 15–29 years and second leading cause of death in 10–14 years and 20–24 years age groups. Motorcycle crashes are the leading cause of mortality and morbidity among teenagers (p-25)

A study was conducted by Keerthana B. et al. (2021) by distributing a survey link to 100 college students in the age group of 18-21 years. 72.3% agreed that they or their friends were involved in accidents, 27.7% disagreed. Also, 95.9% agreed that alcohol intake can cause accidents, 4.1% disagreed. 75% also agreed that severity of injuries can be reduced if speed could be 10 km/hr lower, 25% disagreed. Apart from this, the study established that probable causes of accidents of college students might be sleep deprivation, mental pressure, or reckless driving (pp-82-84)

From the secondary empirical evidence, it can be inferred that personal vehicles, where the college student is in control can become a threat to their safety.

V. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. *“Transport and social exclusion: Where are we now?”*- Karen Lucas, 2012, *Transport Policy*, Transport Studies Unit, University of Oxford, South Parks Road, Oxford, United Kingdom, Volume 20 (Web version)

This research paper, written by Karen Lucas primarily establishes the link between transport poverty and social exclusion. Along with that, it revisits some theoretical concepts and emerging empirical research and tries to clear the ambiguity regarding mobility inequalities and social exclusion. It also gives an overview of policy initiatives already taken in UK and Australia regarding this and suggests how further progress can be made.

2. *“Awareness on Road Traffic Accidents Among College Students”*- Keerthana B. et al., 2021, *Journal of Research in Medical and Dental Science* 2021, Volume 9, Issue 1, Page No: 81-86

This paper written by Keerthana B, Vishnu Priya V, Gayathri R aims to create awareness to road accidents among college students. It had conducted a survey with 100 college students and found that most were aware of traffic rules and regulations. Major causes of accidents could be established, according to the sample and they concluded that more seminars and awareness camps should be encouraged.

VI. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

The theory of alienation has a central role to play as an indicator of the effects of increasing private ownership of vehicles. The basic theory had been given by Karl Marx, as a concept endemic in capitalistic systems. M. Seeman (1959) in his paper gives five alternative meanings or aspects of alienation that can help in understanding the study in question. He describes *powerlessness*, an aspect of alienation as

a variant of alienation can be conceived as the expectancy or probability held by the individual

that his own behavior cannot determine the occurrence of the outcomes, or reinforcements, he seeks (p-784)

He further distinguishes this as a *social-psychological* concept and doesn't consider or give importance to objective reality. An individual's low expectancy of control over the political, economic or industrial events in the society is generally meant by this term. Seeman also depicting *isolation*, as a crucial aspect of alienation, writes that alienated often "*assign low reward value to goals or beliefs that are typically highly valued in the given society*" (id., p-789). The concept of isolation is a little different from the others discussed by Seeman, but can be understood together to give a rich context. Taking *Merton's Anomie theory*, he depicts a situation where the goals and means available to a person is not coordinated. As an extension, it can assumed as a situation where some individuals might share the larger goals set by the society, yet do not have access to the means necessary to achieve, hence innovate or create new goals and means.

Taking help of an adaptation of Amartya Sen's '*entitlement approach*', it can be inferred how already existing assets can play a role in alienation. The entitlement approach, as described by Purusottam Nayak (2000) is based on three conceptual categories, *the endowment set, the entitlement set and the entitlement mapping*. Nayak defines endowment set as "the combination of all those resources that are legally owned by a person conforming to established norms and practices" (id.,p-1), entitlement set as "the set of all possible combinations of goods and services (not just the one actually being enjoyed) that a person can legally obtain by using the resources of his endowment set" (id., p-1) and entitlement mapping as "the rate at which the resources of the endowment set can be converted into goods and services included in the entitlement set" (id.,p-1).

VII. FINDINGS

The study by Karen Lucas (2012) establishes that transport disadvantage and transport-related social exclusion is not always synonymous.

Rather transport disadvantage and social disadvantage interact directly and indirectly to cause transport poverty. This in turn leads to inaccessibility to essential goods and services, as well as 'lock-out' from planning and decision-making processes, which can result in social exclusion outcomes and further social and transport inequalities will then ensue. Transport surveys demonstrate that it is most usually the poorest and most socially disadvantaged within society who also experience transport disadvantage (para 10-11)

It has already been seen that private ownership of vehicle is very less in number in India,

especially for college students. Even if the number is steadily increasing, it is important to note, the wide disparity college students might face due to differential access to transport.

Alienation, for this study, by extension is also related with decreasing community feeling. Access to private transportation is only available to a small non-majority in the urban space and it largely translates into class. A certain sense of relative deprivation can also result from the above situation.

Previous research findings point towards considerable harm towards college students because of private vehicle, precisely because of their control involved. This is not to say, or suggest in any manner that college students are not harmed in public transportation. On the other hand, because of the pandemic, many people might actually avoid using public transportation. However, this study is limited in its scope, that is, it only is concerned about the harm associated with use of personal transport.

By the study by Keerthana B. et al.(2021), it is seen how accidents generally occur due to rash and reckless driving, alcohol intake etc. Which relate with private transport. In this sense, use of motorcycles also come within private transport.

Considering all the aspects mentioned and discussed in the study, use of personal transportation is discouraged, especially for college students. In order to tackle the problem associated with public transportation, it is important to address some of the problems because of which more and more people are shifting from public to private transportation.

VIII. ANALYSIS

It is established primarily, by Karen Lucas's study (2012) that access to transportation is linked with transport poverty and social exclusion. The above study had also mentioned how class has a central role to play in the above differential access because *"there is considerable evidence to suggest that low income non-car owning households in the US also have less access to public transit and, hence, experience considerable difficulties in accessing jobs and other key facilities"* (para-12) The experience of USA might not fit into the experience of any other country, but it gives an idea of the general trend.

To sum up, social exclusion works on many fronts, (a) inaccessibility to transportation facilities results in inability to access life-enhancing facilities, like education, health, job etc.

(b) economically backward families usually fall into groups who do not have access to transportation facilities and face transport-related social exclusion because either they do not own personal vehicle or owning a personal vehicle is financially stressful, do not have access

to public transportation system too, and/or are forced to choose public transportation system because they cannot afford private transport.

Now that a certain link has been established between class, transport disadvantage and social exclusion, alienation concerned with college students can be further analysed.

There exists a large gap between groups owning and not-owning personal vehicle. A binary of upper and lower class is not possible, because many high income families can not own a personal vehicle and many low income families may own a personal vehicle. But, for largely, it can be assumed that generally, families who can afford to buy a car, owns the same. If only 22 individuals per 1000 own a car, then college students owning and using a car is even less.

The gap often results in a heightened feeling of alienation in an urban space. The students from lower income classes might feel *powerless* in the situation where rewards or outcomes they desire cannot be achieved by their own behaviour, largely because they cannot afford to buy a car. It should be noted here that motorcycles can be owned by a number of students coming from low income families but largely they do not even have access to that.

The individual who do not have access to any personal vehicle might feel isolated, because the goals that society fixes, accumulation of material possessions, is not immediately achievable. They tend to give less importance to material possessions but also experience a sense of distance from those owning the same material possessions. A sense of relative deprivation also comes in and works in stages, as stated by British statesman and sociologist Walter Runciman, cited by Robert Longley (2020)

-A person does not have something.

-That person knows other people who have the thing.

-That person wants to have the thing.

-That person believes they have a reasonable chance of getting the thing.

This is very different from absolute deprivation which a condition where a certain nonavailability applies to the whole class or community. On the contrary, relative deprivation largely deals with individual discontent.

Adapting Amartya Sen's entitlement approach to the present study, it can be seen how high income families might have a large number of economic and cultural capital. Economic capital refers to economic assets and cultural capital refers to knowledge and skill. The already existing *endowment set* is hence, a key factor in *entitlement set*. A larger endowment set, usually results in a larger entitlement set, and the *entitlement-mapping* for high income families is also faster.

Therefore, the high income continues to earn more and the low income class continues to earn less and a certain status quo is maintained by way of preventing social mobility.

To sum up, the disparity between endowment sets, available to different individuals are a chief factor of relative deprivation. Relative deprivation causes a sense of powerlessness and isolation, consequently, alienation between different college students.

The harm resulting from use of private vehicle is already established. To present an overview of the same, it can be inferred that college students who have an access to personal transport, be it motorcycle or car, can be careless in handling the same. Evidence is found by studies by Keerthana B. et al. (2021), Maharaj Singh (2018) and Redhwan AA and Karim AJ (2010) that college students have a moderate understanding of traffic rules and regulations. Redhwan and Karim (id. 2010) conclude:

The study participants had moderate knowledge about road traffic regulations and most of them mentioned that high speed, drivers' lack of awareness about traffic regulation and laws, and drivers' non-compliance with traffic rules and regulation were the most important cause of road traffic accidents. Almost all students were very strongly/strongly convinced of seat-belts' importance. Age and attitude were significantly associated with the exposure to the road accident (p-33).

It can, thus, be inferred cumulatively that private use of vehicles by college students can pose a threat to their safety. There is need for awareness programmes, as recognised by the studies. The social as well as physical harm to college students by use of personal transport can be tackled by encouraging the use of public transportation. Moreover, public transportation can prevent harm because of pollution, congestion etc.

Encouragement of public transport can try to bridge the gap between college students coming from different classes, with differential access to transport. It will also increase social interaction and can prevent accidents due to reckless driving etc. The primary reason individuals might be shifting from public to private transport are the problems associated with the system of public transportation system in urban areas such as overcrowded, undependable, slow, inconvenient, uncoordinated bus and train services, among other problems (Pucher, John et al., 2004). These problems need to be addressed, as India is not equipped to handle increasing private ownership of vehicle, as suggested by the cited article.

IX. CONCLUSION

This study has used previous research findings and theoretical perspectives to establish how

accessibility to transport can have an effect on community feeling among college students. It has found a direct link between class and accessibility to transport, which often leads to a sense of relative deprivation and alienation. Through secondary empirical evidence, it is evident that use of private transport is harmful for college students, physically. In a nutshell, I suppose it's important in the near future to encourage public transportation, especially for college students, in order to try to bridge the gap between social classes in urban areas.

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